

1996. From 1985 onwards he received 15 research grants from the Australian Research Council. He raised the status of the geology section at Deakin University from relative obscurity to one of national and international significance.

He was an encouraging and much appreciated tutor, lecturer and postgraduate supervisor. His own research received wide recognition and he established productive linkages with scientists both at home and abroad. He had a strong commitment to international cooperative research and the development of science in countries such as Russia, China, India, Argentina and Timor. He was a member of numerous scientific and academic societies and served on many local and international committees.

Perhaps his most treasured institutional contribution was to the Royal Society of Victoria where he served as honorary librarian for many years. He joined the RSV in 1975 and became a member of Council (1992-2005), Vice-President (1999-2000) and President (2001-2004). His work as custodian of the Society's valuable library and in finding it a perma-

nent home was decisive to its preservation. He helped broaden the Society's appeal to the general public and defended and promoted the Society's traditional scientific emphasis. His legacy is a vital, active Society with a growing membership, in comparison with some similar institutions that at present are struggling for relevance and viability.

Universally regarded as a gentleman, Neil was admired and loved by his colleagues. He was an inspirational scientist, intellectual and teacher. His wisdom, insight, humour, gentleness and fortitude will be deeply missed. His untimely passing at the peak of his career is a grievous loss to science and natural history.

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Survival of a blind Bobuck *Trichosurus cunninghami*, Phalangeridae

The Bobuck or Mountain Brushtail Possum *Trichosurus cunninghami* is a large (2.6-4.2 kg), semi-arboreal, nocturnal marsupial which dens in tree hollows or, less often, hollow logs, disused Common Wombat *Vombatus ursinus* burrows or thickets on the ground. Its predominant food is foliage of Silver Wattle *Acacia dealbata*, and it spends most of its active time on the ground, moving between wattle trees and feeding on additional items including fungi and various understorey and ground-layer plants. General accounts of the Bobuck are provided by Menkhorst (1995, as *T. caninus*) and Kerle (2001, as *T. caninus*); Bobucks in the Strathbogie Ranges, in Victoria, have been intensively studied by Martin (2005; see also Martin *et al.* 2004).

On 16 October 2005, two of the authors (AAM, SMM) encountered an adult female Bobuck on the ground at Marraweeny (36° 44'S, 145° 45'E) in the Strathbogie Ranges, at 1705 hours on a warm, sunny day. She was in a grassy, creek-side area with fern-thickets and scattered Silver Wattles, moving towards the adjacent Peppermint (*Eucalyptus radiata* and *E. dives*) forest. The forest had been logged and included few hollow-bearing trees, but there were numerous used and disused Common Wombat burrows in the area. She was carrying a large back-young; both animals appeared to be well-fed and in excellent condition. In this area young are born in autumn or early winter and leave the pouch to travel on the back at

about 6 months of age; hence this individual would have been 7-8 months old.

When binoculars were trained on the animals it was seen that the corneas of both eyes of the female were bluish-white and opaque (Fig. 1), although the eyes of the back-young appeared normal. There can be no doubt that she was completely blind; nevertheless, she climbed without hesitation on to a fallen tree-trunk and moved confidently along it.

Attention was first drawn to the animals by the barking of a dog. We do not believe that the female had been foraging; but think it likely that she had denned in a ground-level, creek-side thicket and was stirred from it by the dog. Although the dog did not continue to harass or pursue her, she did not forage or move from the log over the subsequent 10 minutes for which she was under observation.

On 13 January 2006, at 0625 hours (first light 0544; sunrise 0614), in clear, bright conditions, one of us (AAM) observed a blind Bobuck (doubtless the same animal) within 30 m of the previous sighting. On this occasion she climbed a Silver Wattle sapling about 2.5 m tall, and fed for about 5 minutes on foliage in its crown. She again appeared to be in good condition, but no back-young was present.

It is remarkable, in an area where dogs, foxes and feral cats are frequently seen and heard, that a blind animal should have survived at all, let alone coped with the hazards of diurnal foraging on the ground. There is direct evidence of foxes, at least, preying on Bobucks in this area (Martin 2005). There is no way of knowing how often this blind female Bobuck has foraged by day, nor for how long she has been blind. The fact that she has bred reveals that she was at least 3 years old in autumn 2005 (Martin 2005), but she may not have been blind for all of that time.

Back-young normally become independent of their mothers at about 12 months of age in this area; hence it is more likely that the back-young died (perhaps by falling

victim to a predator) between October and January than that it achieved independence. It is also possible, however, that the young left its mother earlier than is usual if it was more reluctant than she was to be active in daylight.

Martin (2005) found that the home range area of adult Bobucks (male and female) in a forested area in the Strathbogies was 6.0 ± 0.4 ha (mean \pm SE). The surprising survival of the blind female may, in part, be due to occupation of an atypically small home range. The presence of the permanent creek, the lush creek-side vegetation with dense thickets, the abundance of Silver Wattle and the availability of Common Wombat burrows may mean that she can find a number of refuges and other essential resources within a very small area which she has come to know intimately. Martin (2005) recorded female Bobuck home ranges as small as 1.1 ha in roadside habitat that contained abundant den-sites and food resources.

References

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